

DISCUSSION ON TRUTH.

WITH reference to Miss Fagan's article on "Truthfulness," may I quote George Herbert's well-known lines, "Who aimeth at a star shoots higher far than he who means a tree." We might well ask with Pilate, "What is truth?" with the same result. We fail, we must fail often, for how can we possibly expect our ideals to be realized or brought to perfection in this world? But would these reasons justify our giving up our search for that which illumined and made powerful Christ's life on earth, presuming to say that His ideal of truth was too high for us with our social ties and influences? Assuming that we *are* justified in so acting, yet is it possible for us to see clearly *where* to draw the line between truth and polite lies? And if *we* are unable to, can the unpractised, inexperienced reason of a child discern the difference? Surely we teach our children that our duty to God comes first, our duty to our neighbour necessarily second as reflected from God to them. In which case, are we not inconsistent if we teach a child to tell a lie rather than wound a neighbour, obviously inferring a preference for wounding our Heavenly Father to an earthly friend. I think silence does not necessarily imply what is untrue. If a secret was intrusted to our keeping concerning our queen or country, should we be right to betray our secret on the plea that we should be acting a lie by withholding our knowledge. On the other hand, *should* we be acting a lie by being silent, unless we inferred by our silence what was not true?

If the old lady mentioned by Miss Fagan brings us her border expecting us to express our admiration, can we not — even if the colours are unartfully combined — can we not see something else to admire in it? Either the working, or the design, or can we not praise the patience and quickness of the worker? If we are asked whether we like the combination of colours, I think *then* we should answer to the best of our ability and truthfully. If we are not asked, what right have we to force our opinion, merely because it is our opinion, on to our neighbours or friends? What right have we, when we hear a thing praised which we dislike, to presume to air our ideas at the risk of hurting a praiser's feelings? Does it matter to the universe whether one small atom thinks a few colours look hideous or pretty? Therefore, unless our opinion is desired or

necessary to the well-being of our fellow creatures, let us resort to silence, "hear each man's censure, but reserve our judgment." I cannot see that by thus keeping silence we are acting a lie.

As to our teaching, we can but teach what we know. "For we know in part and prophesy in part." And if we give the children the initial idea — that science is always, like the sea, on the ebb and flow; that as men advance their brains become more fitted to receive greater ideas from above, which may alter many things which we now believe to be facts — I do not think that that will in any way lower the children's ideal of truth, nor do we make ourselves liars by so teaching. We must give our children the best we can, and I think it is possible for a child to be wholly truthful. As we grow up, to each one of us occasions occur when our way seems dark and doubts overwhelm us. I think then that each one of us must act according to our own conscience. If on one particular occasion we feel it right to equivocate, it does not follow that we are right, nor does it follow that for everyone it is right to equivocate now and then. We may still aim at perfect truth, feeling that in some way our reasoning or the world's ways and means are morally incorrect, and thus we have failed. A great reason why people do not always speak truthfully is because truth is not expected or looked for; perhaps because so many have tried to be wholly truthful but have failed, then have given up their search for truth as an impossible attainment, and so have fallen a step backwards. It seems to me that even if we of this generation cannot satisfy our yearning for truth, cannot we leave behind us a generation one step nearer that ideal? Not a generation equivocating when it sees fit, which must necessarily depend on each individual's reasoning powers. This we can do only through the children. A child is naturally more open and truthful than a grown-up person; why should we blunt his perceptions? Let truth, and perfect truth, in matters small and large, in acts and words, be given the child. Truth is strength in itself, and by teaching a child perfect truth we are making him strong, and he will be able to face and cope with the doubts and difficulties of the world with a clear head, a high ideal, and the ultimate purpose — that of leaving the next generation one step nearer perfection in all things. And though he fails through consideration of other people's feelings, and through the intricate laws and ways of our present society, he will consider his failings as failings, not as proof of the non-existence of truth.

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